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Best places? Yeah, we're on the list

By MITCHELL KLINE • Staff Writer • August 17, 2008

At the top of the list

Some of the top lists Williamson has made the past few years:

- Money magazine, 2003: "Hot town" list, Brentwood – 9th
- Forbes.com, 2008: Best places to get ahead, Williamson County – 10th
- CNNMoney.com, 2008: Skinniest places to live, Williamson/Maury counties – 3rd
- Money magazine, 2008: Best places to live, Franklin – 45th
- Money magazine, 2005: Best places to live, Franklin – 58th
- Money magazine, 2003: Best places to retire, Franklin listed among top choices
- U.S. Census Bureau: Top counties by median household income, Williamson – 18th, \$81,449
- U.S. Census Bureau: Personal per capita income, Williamson – 47th, \$47,712
- U.S. Department of Labor, 2007: ranking of percentage increase in average weekly wages, Williamson – 8th (average weekly wage \$1,020, up 8.2 percent from 2006)
- U.S. Department of Labor, 2007: ranking of percentage increase in employment, Williamson – 3rd (up 4.5 percent from 2006)

- Newsweek's 2008 top high schools list

Brentwood - 192nd
Ravenwood - 473rd
Franklin - 737th
Fairview - 854th
Independence - 1,318th
Centennial - 1,405th

FRANKLIN — If you're keeping score, Williamson County and its cities have been ranked among the top places to live, get an education, go to work, get ahead and even retire.

In the past five years Williamson County, its cities and schools have made it onto at least nine "best places" lists. Media outlets that compile such rankings generally compare household incomes, population growth, employment, crime statistics and education levels.

The county's most recent ranking — third "skinniest" place to live, according to CNNMoney.com — might come with a few chuckles, but it still helps the area stand out.

Robb Campbell, owner of a chain of Re/Max Elite offices in Middle Tennessee, said out-of-state homebuyers often mention that they spotted Franklin or Brentwood on a list.

"We get that all the time," Campbell said. "They read articles about the best places to live, retire, relocate and where the best schools are. It makes our job a

lot easier when they come to town and know approximately where they want to buy."

Tom Vastano, who moved his medical training business and his family to Franklin this year, spent six years and visited 20 cities before deciding Franklin was where he wanted to be. He

started and ended his search by looking at lists and saw the city ranked as the 45th best place to live by Money magazine.

"There's really no other way to find out about a city," Vastano said. "You have to have something that will give you information about a place. You either find that online or from someone you know."

While Williamson County has been ranked among the skinniest places in the country, its workers have some of the fattest paychecks. The county placed 18th in a recent ranking of median household incomes nationwide by the U.S. Census Bureau.

The county also came out near the top in a U.S. Department of Labor study on employment and weekly wages. Williamson had the third largest year-over-year percentage increase in employment and ranked eighth in year-over-year percentage increase in average weekly wages. The average weekly wage here is \$1,020.

Matt Largen, director of the county's Office of Economic Development, said that while he thinks companies looking to relocate would put more stock in employment rankings and the "best places to live" list, landing on the skinny list may prove more memorable.

"It's a reflection of how healthy people are in an area," Largen said. "If you showed that to a client, it may be one thing that sticks in their mind. It's better to be the third-skinniest than the third-fattest place."